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Articles in Today's Clips Wednesday, December 5, 2007

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<u>TOPIC</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
*Ricky Holland	2-5
Kids Count	6-9
Child Abuse/Neglect/Protection	10-19
Domestic Violence	20-22
Health Care	23-28
Teen Births	29
Food Assistance	30-34
Charities	35-39
Triangle Project	40-41

*Important story at this spot

CHAPTER 4: COULD YOU HAVE SAVED RICKY?

Deep secret, serious regret

Lisa hides pregnancy from state, says adopting Ricky was big mistake

December 5, 2007

BY JACK KRESNAK

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Fourth of 14 parts

Tim and Lisa Holland were keeping a secret in the fall of 2003.

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Lisa was pregnant.

They already had their hands full. They were adopting 6-year-old Ricky, who continued to exhibit erratic behavior, and his half-brother, Trevor, almost 2, who was developmentally delayed.

They also were foster parents to the boys' sister, Sarah, then almost 1. And for several months until early September, they were caring for Lisa's 2-year-old nephew as a foster child.

But the Hollands held off telling their Department of Human Services caseworkers about the pregnancy because they were hoping to take in yet another child: a fourth sibling to Ricky, Trevor and Sarah. He was a boy, Brett, who would be born Dec. 3 and placed with the Hollands the next day.

Lisa was worried the DHS would balk at giving them the baby if they knew she'd soon have a newborn. Lisa waited until three weeks after Brett arrived to tell the DHS her secret.

In October, Lisa was home alone with the kids while Tim, a civilian intelligence specialist with the Army, was getting training at a base in Arizona for possible deployment to Iraq. She wrote to Tim, telling him that everyone missed him and the family was managing "the best we can." Ricky was acting up, as usual, lying about things and having bathroom issues. "I usually put him in his room and forget him," she wrote.

And then she revealed another secret.

Deep down, she wished they could have adopted Sarah first.

"I would not have done the boys at all," Lisa told her husband.

Trouble at school

Every six weeks or so, Ricky was seeing psychiatrist Dr. Aurif Abedi at Foote Hospital in Jackson.

Abedi adjusted Ricky's medications based on Lisa's reports of how the kindergartner was doing at home and at Cascades Elementary in Jackson. The doctor tried to set dosages that would calm Ricky down without harming his

ability to learn. Ricky now was taking a drug for attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, a mood stabilizer and an antidepressant to help him sleep.

An assessment by his adoption worker earlier that year was upbeat -- school was going well, tantrums were only occasional and the medications seemed to be working. The Hollands told the DHS there were no problems they couldn't handle.

But in May, there was a serious incident at school. Ricky refused to do something his teacher asked, talked back to her and ran out of the building and down Wisner Street. The interim principal had to get in her car to catch him. He was suspended for a day and a half.

Through the spring, the Hollands reported to the DHS that Ricky's behavior was worsening. Lisa also asked the school to evaluate him for placement in special education. But the school decided he was on target academically. Lisa insisted he be assigned to ride the special-ed bus anyway. Ricky hated having to leave class early to do it.

Finally, Ricky's foster care worker, Theresa Bronsberg, decided Ricky might need to go back into counseling, something he hadn't had for about a year after Lisa Holland resisted it. But Abedi had recommended it all along, and therapy was required for Ricky's foster care support and medical subsidies -- then almost \$30 a day -- to carry over to adoption.

Adoption goes through

Lisa met Sept. 17 with therapist David Snyder at Family Services & Children's Aid in Jackson without Ricky, so Snyder could learn more about the boy and set a schedule for counseling.

"I believe it would be in Ricky's best interest that no other children be placed in his home until he perceives that his own situation has stabilized," Snyder wrote afterward. Right away, the Hollands raised objections. They wanted family counseling, not just one-on-one therapy for Ricky.

Tim e-mailed Bronsberg the next day, saying he didn't trust the agency to help Ricky because "they don't want Lisa and I involved." And family counseling wouldn't be possible if Tim was sent to Iraq.

Lisa canceled a follow-up appointment to have Ricky seen at the agency as Bronsberg -- unaware the counseling wasn't proceeding -- was telling her superiors that Ricky was in therapy and the Hollands would be meeting with his therapist weekly.

Based on that information, the adoption subsidy was approved and the Hollands formally adopted Ricky and Trevor on Oct. 21.

He steals food, denies he's hungry

Ricky was in the first grade at Cascades, and his behavior soon began to border on the bizarre. He was snatching other kids' lunches and going through trash cans, looking for food. The school suspended him for three days in November for stealing food.

Some at school thought he wasn't being fed at home, but when asked, he would rattle off a list of things he'd eaten for breakfast -- pancakes, eggs, bacon, cereal. Yet when a bus aide looked inside his lunch bag one day, she found what she called a "carrot sandwich" -- carrot slices and mayonnaise between two slices of bread. Ricky hated carrots.

Lisa Holland began stapling the bags shut. She also fought with the school about whether Ricky should be restrained in a harness on the bus. The school sided with the driver and bus aide, who thought Ricky was fine without it.

In April 2004, near the end of her pregnancy, Lisa abruptly pulled Ricky out of school. She said it was too stressful for him and she would homeschool him.

Carol Coxon, the school nurse, was alarmed. She dispensed Ricky's medications and saw bruises on his back and chest earlier in the school year, though Ricky never said anything to make her suspect he was being mistreated. Lisa attributed the marks to wearing the harness on the bus. But after Lisa took Ricky out of school, Coxon called Child Protective Services.

She told investigators about Ricky's apparent hunger and odd behavior with food, the time he ran away from school and once when he arrived wearing a soiled diaper. She and others believed it was humiliating for the first-grader to wear diapers, but no one called CPS at the time.

The CPS investigation concluded the complaints were old and Ricky's former caseworker, Bronsberg, had no concerns whatsoever about the Hollands' handling of him. "Based on the additional information we collected, the child does not appear to be harmed," Coxon was told by letter.

In late April, after witnessing Ricky repeatedly slap himself during a visit, Abedi concluded the boy was showing signs of a more serious problem -- bipolar mood disorder. He suggested hospitalization, which upset Ricky. Abedi continued the boy's medications and asked the Hollands to closely monitor him and report back. But the Hollands stopped taking Ricky to Abedi that July. Lisa called once in November to ask for refills of two prescriptions; Abedi agreed, as long as Lisa promised to bring Ricky in for an office visit. She never did.

Lisa, meanwhile, had asked again to have Ricky placed in special education and, in May 2004, she learned the results of testing done between February and April: He was performing at or above grade level in academics, and measures of emotional disturbance and anxiety were mostly in the normal range.

But he's fine with grandparents

Lisa delivered a baby girl on May 19. The following day, her father drove Ricky from Jackson to Tim's parents' home behind their party store in DeWitt. Tim's adoptive mother, Arcie Holland, recalled that Ricky stayed three or four days.

He played in the store -- just as Tim did when he was a boy. Ricky would greet customers, introducing himself and telling them that his mom just had a baby. A police officer gave him a cardboard badge and Ricky shook the man's hand. His parents hadn't sent toys, so his grandmother bought him a few games. He spent hours playing pickup sticks and Chinese checkers.

Ricky wasn't aggressive, impulsive or out of control.

"He was a good boy while he was here," Arcie said. "He had fun here."

Contact **JACK KRESNAK** at 313-223-4544 or jkresnak@freepress.com. **THURSDAY: A boy on a leash.**

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Ricky's drug therapy navigated tricky ground

December 5, 2007

BY JACK KRESNAK

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

For nearly three years, Dr. Aurif Abedi, a child psychiatrist at Jackson's Foote Hospital, treated Ricky Holland's often strange and violent behavior with drugs, adjusting them based on reports from Ricky's primary caregiver, Lisa Holland.

Abedi first diagnosed the boy with attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, using assessments from a psychologist and a counselor, Lisa's accounts of Ricky's behavior and Abedi's own observations. Abedi prescribed stimulants such as Ritalin for the ADHD and the antidepressant trazodone to help Ricky sleep.

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"He had periods where he did better and then he had periods where he was not doing well," Abedi recalled recently. "When we started finally addressing it as a mood disorder, he did very well."

Abedi prescribed the antipsychotic drug Zyprexa to help stabilize Ricky's moods.

The Food and Drug Administration has not approved the use of trazodone and Zyprexa for children. But such use is fairly common, said Dr. Sheila Marcus, a child psychiatrist and director of child and adolescent psychiatry at the University of Michigan Medical School.

The off-label use of such medications may occur in children who have highly disruptive or aggressive behaviors, Marcus said.

"But it really needs to be part of a comprehensive treatment package" that could include counseling and respite care to give parents a break from the regimen of dealing with troubled kids, Marcus said.

Abedi was not told by Lisa or Ricky's foster care worker that Lisa had stopped Ricky's counseling, and he did not know that Lisa had taken Ricky out of school to homeschool him.

In the wake of Ricky's case, Abedi said, he and other professionals working with children in Jackson now meet regularly to share information and communicate concerns about children in the foster care or adoption system.

"Everybody is aware that you could be taken for a ride" by bad parents, Abedi said. "Could this happen again? I hope not. Will it happen again? Unfortunately, I can see it happening again."

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Article published Dec 4, 2007

Focus on kids

Underweight babies and overweight teens: two trends that health officials and children's advocates say more people should pay attention to.

The annual Kids Count in Michigan study found overweight high school students, underweight babies and child abuse up on the state level, putting Michigan at risk of missing national health improvement goals and watching the overall level of health decrease.

The study is performed every year under the belief that: "the health of children and youth is profoundly influenced by the physical, geographic, economic, social and emotional context in which they are growing up."

The report found four indicators where child well-being eroded over time - rising rates of abused or neglected children, low-birthweight infants and overweight high school students, a companion problem to the falling rates of youth who participated in vigorous physical activity on a regular basis.

While Monroe County mirrored state trends in most areas, some other areas stood out.

The percentage of low-birthweight babies born to Michigan mothers rose from an average 7.9 percent from 2000 to 8.3 percent in 2005, despite a goal of trying to get the rate down to 5 percent by 2010. That trend proved to be the same for Monroe County, with low-weight births rising from an average 6.2 percent in 2000 to 7.9 percent average in 2005.

Monroe County also showed an increase in inadequate prenatal care. From 2000 to 2005, the data indicated a rise from 22.9 percent not receiving adequate care in 2000 to 24.7 percent not receiving the care in 2005 - exceeding the state average of 21.9 percent who received substandard care.

Figures show 11.4 confirmed cases of child abuse or neglect per 1,000 Michigan children in 2006, up from 10.3 cases in 2000 and above the 2010 goal of 10 cases per 1,000 children.

The children who were confirmed to be abused or neglected in Monroe County stayed relatively steady, dipping slightly from 260 to 233 children, with a rate of 6.1 children per 1,000 showing abuse or neglect in 2006. When compared with other counties across the state, Monroe was on the low end of confirmed cases, ranking sixth out of 83.

One statistic that stood out was the increase in children living in poverty - a statewide phenomenon.

The number of those living poor between birth until 17 increased 3 percent from 3,281 in 2000 to 4,338 in 2004. The numbers mean that roughly 11 percent of children 17 and younger in the community live at or below poverty level.

Supt. Donald Spencer of the Monroe County Intermediate School District said he isn't surprised by the trend.

"It tells me that first of all, education is an economic issue and we all have to realize that," he said. "We have to do a better job getting more kids better educated. We have to have more of our kids excelling in school, yet when facing things like poverty and lack of nutrition and health care, it's more of a challenge. Education is the way to break that cycle."

According to the report summary, Michigan had already reached the Healthy People 2010 target on three indicators by 2005 - its rates of immunization for toddlers, teen pregnancy and physical fighting among high school students.

In 2005, 81 percent of toddlers were fully immunized, better than the 80 percent goal. Also that year, the 30 percent of high-schoolers reporting being involved in a fight over the past 12 months was below the 32 percent target.

Monroe County matched up with the state in those three areas.

There was a marked decrease in births to teens 15-19 during the time span in Monroe.

In 2000, there were roughly 38 births for every 1,000 teens between 15 and 19. In 2005, the rate went down to 27 per 1,000.

Although fewer Michigan teens say they're binge drinking or using tobacco, the report found that more are getting too little exercise. Twelve percent of high-schoolers reported being overweight, up from 11 percent in 2001 and above the goal of 5 percent, according to the survey of risk behavior among Michigan youth.

About 62 percent said they got regular, vigorous exercise, down from 65 percent in 2001 and below the target rate of 85 percent.

The numbers of Kids Count also found a large difference in the health of different racial groups - something the Healthy People 2010 initiative is trying to tackle.

"Being healthy is about much more than just making sure a child gets adequate medical care," said Jane Zehnder-Merrell, the project's director. "The health of our children reflects the conditions in which they live in our communities, such as housing, and the resources in their families and neighborhoods."

Mr. Spencer agreed that all aspects work together to create health children, healthy adults and a health community. And though the school district takes the Kids Count seriously, sometimes discrepancies arise.

Mr. Spencer said, for example, the number of special education students is usually higher in Kids Count than in school district figures. It's often a matter of how the information is collected and tabulated, he said.

"It's more or less a reason to look deeper at our local scene and ask, are we actually seeing the same thing?" he said. "We usually will look more at the trends, rather than the individual numbers. It definitely gives us a place to start, and indicates where we should be looking if we're not looking there already."

Unless the state acts more decisively in the next few years, Michigan will fail to meet many goals for children in the federal government's 10-year Healthy People 2010 public health plan, the report said.

The Kids Count report is put together by groups including the Michigan League for Human Services and Michigan's Children. The report was funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Skillman Foundation, the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Michigan Foundation and local United Ways.

Lake County rated highest for child poverty

More Lake County children are trapped in poverty than children anywhere else in Michigan, according to the annual Kids Count report released Tuesday.

Lake, Wexford, Missaukee and Osceola counties all showed rising rates of economic insecurity for children between 2000 to 2006. These counties also experienced higher percentages of child abuse and neglect. But Lake County's children saw the dimmest statistics with twice the state average rate for confirmed cases of neglect and abuse.

Poverty and neglect are ill-fated partners, according to Jane Zehnder-Merrell, senior research associate at the Michigan League for Human Services and Kids Count project director.

"Seventy-nine percent of the neglect cases in the state are inextricably linked to poverty," she said.

Kids Count had more bad news for Lake County children. The county was one of four in Michigan which failed to show targeted reductions in teen pregnancies. Additional indicators provide glimpses of the pervasiveness of the economic stress.

During the last school year, 84 percent of Lake County's children received free or reduced school lunches, ranking it 83rd of Michigan's 83 counties.

"When issues such as food take precedence over other needs, such as medical care, there are fewer opportunities and experiences for the child. It could be cultural experiences or interactions with role models," said Jim Ganger, Pine River Schools superintendent and principal for Luther Elementary in Lake County. "These students start out behind other students and there are more barriers for them to overcome.

Health Officer for District No. 10 Health Department Linda VanGills said as a state we need to support prevention programs and begin with the young. Historically, the state has failed to back strong preventative efforts, according to VanGills.

More on Kids Count, page A3

From page A1

The state's troubled economy is stressing families and at the same time limiting resource funding.

"It's a very difficult time now for families with the economy," VanGills said. "Many are living on the edge and are struggling." Kids Count 2007 focused on factors impacting health, including community conditions, family and neighborhood resources. It found young Michiganders across the state experienced worsening rates in child abuse or neglect, low birth-rate infants and overweight high school students.

"The big shock to us is that we're making limited progress," Zehnder-Merrell said. "Health is the bedrock. If we want children to perform educationally and their health isn't in good shape, it doesn't bode well for building an educated workforce.

Based on the new figures, it is unlikely the state will reach its health goals for children and teens set by the Healthy People national initiative, she said.

But there is also positive news. With few exceptions, Michigan reached its 2010 target goal for teen pregnancies, physical fights among high schoolers and toddler immunization. The immunization numbers are especially encouraging since only a decade ago Michigan ranked 49th in the country in immunization rates.

"This shows if there is a targeted effort we can make a difference on these indicators," Zehnder-Merrell said. "We can address these with policies, programs and community services.

The benefit of collaboration is evident locally. Ganger said during the past 12 years he has worked with the Pine River School District, which spans portions of Osceola and Lake counties, he has observed improvements in services to the young.

"I think we do a much better job identifying, helping and assisting students," he said. "Within the school system, we have teachers and staff who are very concerned and passionate for every child and they are quick to refer them to counselors and agencies for what they need.

Raising a healthy and productive generation will require a more collaborative efforts, according to Zehnder-Merrell.

"We need a strong support structure to make sure kids have access to early nutrition and childhood programs," she said. "It's not one thing. We need a broad array of services.

To view the complete version of the 2007 Kids Count report, go to www.milhs.org.

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WASHINGTON TWP.

Man is sentenced in baby's death

He's accused of hitting then-girlfriend's daughter in 2003

December 5, 2007

BY CHRISTINA HALL

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

A St. Clair County man charged in the 2003 death of his then-girlfriend's baby daughter in Washington Township was sentenced Tuesday to 7 1/2 to 20 years in prison.

Anthony Rizzo, 32, made no statement during his sentencing in Macomb County Circuit Court in Mt. Clemens in the death of 10 1/2 -month-old Kala Faye Kacarakas.

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Rizzo was accused of hitting her while she was in a car seat while her mother was inside a drugstore at 26 Mile and Van Dyke on July 8, 2003, Macomb County Assistant Prosecutor Steve Kaplan said.

In October, Rizzo pleaded guilty to second-degree murder. He had been charged with first-degree murder, first-degree child abuse and involuntary manslaughter, but pleaded to the lesser charge as part of a deal.

"We're very pleased that he will be held accountable for causing the child's death," Kaplan said.

Rizzo's attorney, Jeffrey Stone, said his client "still denies doing anything to this day."

Stone said a motion to have Rizzo's sentence reduced will be filed in a couple of years pending good behavior by his client.

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7 1/2 years for cold case infant death

Clay Township man pleads to second-degree murder

By Jameson Cook
Macomb Daily Staff Writer

A 32-year-old Clay Township man will spend at least 7 1/2 years in prison for fatally striking the 10-month-old daughter of his girlfriend more than four years ago.

Anthony J. Rizzo IV was taken away in street clothes in Macomb County Circuit Court on Tuesday to go to prison for the July 2003 death of Kala Faye Kacarka of Algonac. He was accused of hitting her one time in the head in a vehicle in a Washington Township parking lot.

Rizzo, originally charged with felony murder, pleaded no contest to second-degree murder and reached a sentencing agreement with Judge Richard Caretti, whose ruling was at the bottom of sentencing guidelines.

Rizzo did not apologize at the sentencing and still believes he didn't do anything wrong but did not want to risk going to trial, according to his attorney, Jeffrey Stone.

In a trial, "it really could've gone either way, and if he was convicted, he would've been facing a sentence of life in prison without parole," Stone said after the hearing. "This was really a manslaughter case."

The defense would have revolved around medical testimony, Stone said. However, the defense's expert witness, Dr. Bader Cassin, indicated that he could vary the time that Kala suffered the fatal blow by only 30 minutes at most, Stone said. The girl's mother, Tracy Kuhr, testified in district court she left Kala alone with Rizzo for five to 10 minutes July 8, 2003, in a Chevrolet Silverado at 26 Mile and Van Dyke, while she went into a Rite Aid store. She returned to find her suffering breathing and other problems.

Kuhr and the boy's father, Jeremiah Kacarka, said in written statements read by Trooper Chris Tuckey to the judge that they preferred a life sentence for Rizzo.

"I feel that when it comes to Mr. Rizzo is should be an eye for an eye," Kuhr said. "He took a life so should get a life."

Kacarka said, "I should not have been cheated out of having her in my life."

Assistant Macomb prosecutor Steven Kaplan noted that other family members agreed with the outcome and that even though the case was strong, it contained flaws - one was that there was no eyewitness to Rizzo hitting the

infant.

Also, an interview of Rizzo by Clay Township police in 2003 was ruled inadmissible by Caretti in August because a police officer failed to read Miranda rights to Rizzo.

Kaplan added that if Kuhr had originally cooperated with police, the case would have been resolved years ago.

Rizzo likely will serve longer than the minimum term because most murder convicts are not released on their first chance at parole, Kaplan said.

Kaplan, who heads the Prosecutor's Office cold case unit, noted that Rizzo did not intend to kill the girl but "knowingly created a high risk of death."

"It's a reckless form of murder," he said.

Due in part to Kuhr's lack of cooperation, charges in the case were delayed for three years. Investigators also couldn't establish a location of the injury because the couple lived together in Clay in St. Clair County but were in Macomb County when they realized Kala was injured and rushed her to a hospital. She died two days later from blunt force trauma to her head. In addition, the prior detective in charge of the case retired.

Tuckey revived the investigation, and Kuhr agreed to cooperate. The couple had since broken up.

In that time, Stone pointed out that Rizzo didn't flee the area, "bettered himself" by obtaining a degree and continued to work up until the sentencing.

Rizzo had been held in the Macomb County Jail from when he was arrested in May until August, when he posted 10 percent of a \$500,000 bond.

A no contest plea is treated as a guilty plea in criminal court but provides some legal protection in civil court.

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Girl put life on line for mother

8-year-old lunged at man who forced his way into car

December 5, 2007

BY M.L. ELRICK

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

As her mother lay bleeding from two gunshot wounds and a family friend frantically called police, 8-year-old Alexia Parker lunged at an ex-con who apparently planned to kill them all.

On Tuesday, Alexia was recovering from multiple gunshot wounds, many to the head, in a Detroit hospital, said Aisha Ford, the friend who repeatedly called 911 in a desperate attempt to thwart 29-year-old Kelvin (Bird) Tillie.

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Tillie is being held without bond in the Wayne County Jail on multiple charges, including assault with intent to commit murder, after police said he shot Alexia and her mother, Selietha Parker, around midnight Sunday.

Ford said Alexia lost her right eye and is awaiting an operation and lengthy therapy after the assault at an east side gas station. Parker, who was shot in the head and arm, has been released from the hospital, Ford said.

As brutal as the ordeal was, Ford said she is grateful they are all alive.

She told the Free Press on Tuesday that it all started when she went to pick up Alexia and her mom Saturday so they could spend the night at her house. The Parkers' furnace was out and they needed a warm place to stay.

Ford said she saw a man coming from behind the Parkers' home after she pulled up, but figured it was a repairman.

Alexia seemed happy as she stepped out of the house, asking Ford about her son.

It wasn't until they were about to pull away that Ford said she realized the man was Tillie, Parker's ex-boyfriend.

"When he entered into my car he entered with the gun showing," Ford said, adding that she asked him, "Why you got that gun around that baby?"

Tillie told her not to call the cops, Ford said.

"He was like a bomb just ready to explode."

Ford said Tillie ordered her to drive them to 6 Mile. She said he didn't say where, just that she needed to drive.

"He just had so much anger, hatred," she said. "I knew I was not going to make it that night if I didn't get out of the car."

At that point, Ford was grateful she drove a gas guzzling Ford Expedition SUV. Although she had put \$15 worth of gas into the car, the low fuel light flashed on.

Girl put life on line for mother

Ford said she told Tillie she needed to get some gas right away, and pulled into the Fast Stop gas station on East 7 Mile.

She said Tillie gave her \$10 and told her to put \$5 worth of gas into the SUV.

But as Tillie went inside the station to pay, she used her cell phone to call 911 for help.

A police report describes a tense situation inside and outside the SUV.

After calling for help, Ford tried to stretch out the amount of time it takes to pump less than two gallons of gas.

"Hoping the police would arrive" Ford "kept slowly cutting the pump off, trying to stall," the report said.

Meanwhile, it said Tillie was losing his cool.

"She's taking too long. She better hurry up before I start shooting," the report quoted Tillie as saying while Parker begged him to calm him down and "to not do this with her daughter ... in the car."

Playing for more time, Ford took another \$5 into the gas station and told the attendant, "I don't need the gas, I'm waiting for the police."

The report says the attendant "dialed 911 three times before connecting with a 911 operator."

It said he heard Ford "yell into the phone 'Why hadn't you come? He's gonna shoot us!' " moments before Tillie began firing.

After watching her mother get shot, Alexia "jumped into the front seat, trying to protect her mom and stop" Tillie, the police report said.

The report added that Tillie "without hesitation, immediately fired six shots into" Alexia who "collapsed, critically injured."

The report says Parker escaped from the car and ran toward the store screaming, "He shot my baby!"

Police showed up just after the shooting stopped and arrested Tillie. They found Alexia "huddled on the floorboard beneath the steering wheel."

Alexia was rushed to a hospital in critical condition. But Ford said Tuesday that she was doing well.

Tillie, who was arraigned Monday, faces life in prison if convicted of the charges.

He has previous convictions for assault with intent to rob while armed, home invasion and resisting arrest. He has been on parole since April.

Contact **M.L. ELRICK** at 313-222-6582 or mlelrick@freepress.com.

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Wednesday, December 5, 2007

Girl, 7, shot 6 times saving mom

Norman Sinclair, Santiago Esparza and Jennifer Mrozowski / The Detroit News

DETROIT -- A 7-year-old-girl is being hailed as an "angel from heaven" and a hero for jumping in front of an enraged gunman, who pumped six bullets into the child as she used her body as a shield to save her mother's life.

Alexis Goggins, a first-grader at Campbell Elementary School, is in stable condition at Children's Hospital in Detroit recovering from gunshot wounds to the eye, left temple, chin, cheek, chest and right arm.

"She is an angel from heaven," said Aisha Ford, a family friend for 15 years who also was caught up in the evening of terror.

The girl's mother, Selietha Parker, 30, was shot in the left side of her head and her bicep by a former boyfriend, who police said was trying to kill Parker. The gunman was disarmed by police and arrested at the scene of the shooting, a Detroit gas station. Police identified him as Calvin Tillie, 29, a four-time convicted felon whom Parker had dated for six months.

Parker, who was treated and released at Detroit Receiving Hospital, is now at her daughter's bedside. She declined to comment Tuesday.

The drama began to unfold just before midnight Saturday, when Parker called Ford and asked if she and Alexis could spend the night at Ford's home.

"She said she had no heat and they were very cold, and I said, sure I'll come and get you," Ford said.

Ford said she drove her burgundy 1998 Ford Expedition to Parker's home on Dwyer. She said as Parker and Alexis walked up to her vehicle she saw a man on the porch, who she assumed was a furnace repairman. She said Alexis, who walks with a limp, slipped momentarily on the icy sidewalk and as she helped the girl up, she saw the man and recognized him as Tillie. He was holding a gun.

Tillie ordered them into the vehicle, cursed at the women and angrily told Ford to drive him to Six Mile Road, she said.

"He looked like he was enraged and didn't care what he did. I knew if we went to Six Mile, he would kill us," Ford said. Instead, she told him she needed gas and drove to the Fast Stop Gas station in the 5000 block of East Seven Mile Road, a station that requires customers to pay the attendant inside.

"I figured if he got out to pump the gas, I was going to take off," Ford said.

Instead, Tillie gave her \$10 and told her put in \$5 worth of gas.

Ford said she dialed 911 on her cell phone as she walked into the station.

"The first operator clicked off and I dialed again and told that operator a guy with a gun was holding me hostage with a mother and baby and threatening to kill us. I told her the name of the gas station and then she said they didn't have a unit to send."

Ford said she paid for \$5 of gas and slowly returned to the vehicle, stalling for time as she handed Tillie the change. She said she kept stopping and starting the pump, hoping the police would show up.

"I told him I needed more gas and took money out of my purse and went back into the station," she said.

The attendant, Mohammad Alghazali, 30, said he noticed Ford was crying and she told him what was happening. He called 911 as he heard shots coming from the vehicle.

"It was very scary. She (Ford) was scared and screaming when the guy was shooting. I was scared, too. I was on the phone talking to the police when he started shooting," he said.

Parker told police that Tillie said Ford was taking too long.

She said she pleaded with him but he pointed the gun at her and shot her in the side of the head. She told police she was shot in the arm as she lunged at Tillie.

Before Tillie could fire again, Alexis jumped over the seat between her mother and the gunman and begged him not to shoot her mother.

The police report said Tillie "without hesitation" pumped six shots into the child.

As police arrived, they saw Parker, covered in blood, running from the truck, screaming, "He just shot my baby."

The officers said Tillie came out to the vehicle holding a blue steel 9 mm semi automatic and dropped the weapon when ordered to do so. Officers said they found Alexis huddled on the floor under the steering wheel, covered in blood, surrounded by spent cartridge casings, a spent bullet on the floor and teeth on the seat. There were bullet holes in the windshield and blood inside.

Alghazali said a police car on a street nearby arrived in less than a minute after his call.

Marvin Bodley, a Detroit Public Schools attendance agent, spent two days at Alexis' hospital bedside and said it's miraculous that she's alive.

"What a courageous, courageous little girl," he said. "You see more bandages than child," he said. "It's a horrific sight."

Bodley said Alexis receives special education services at school, in part because of a weak left eye, which is the result of a massive stroke she suffered as an infant.

Ford said doctors at the time had predicted that when Alexis got older she would have trouble with tasks such as writing, but she is now able to write her name.

"She is a good little girl who is very protective of her mother," said Tonya Colbert, Parker's cousin.

Tillie is being held in the Wayne County Jail facing kidnapping, assault with intent to murder, child abuse, felony firearms and habitual criminal charges.

A preliminary examination is scheduled for Dec. 13.

Find this article at:

<http://www.detnews.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20071205/METRO/712050396>

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Muskegon Chronicle

Father in drowning case gets year in jail

Wednesday, December 05, 2007

By John S. Hausman

jhausman@muskegonchronicle.com

A Muskegon Township father was sentenced to a year in jail this morning for sleeping while he was supposed to be watching his daughter and her cousin, both 5, who drowned in an unused backyard pool last summer.

Before sentencing, the mothers of both girls spoke in court -- with directly opposite points of view. One wanted a longer sentence in prison; the other wanted no punishment at all. Both dissolved in tears at the end of their statements.

Fourteenth Circuit Judge James M. Graves Jr. sentenced Chillum Oudsema, 30, to the county jail term with eligibility for work release. The judge also placed Oudsema on probation for 21/2 years and ordered him to pay fines and costs of \$720.

Oudsema himself did not speak.

Oudsema pleaded no contest last month to two counts of second-degree child abuse, a felony. At the time of his plea, the judge committed to a sentence that would not include state prison time. The convictions carry a maximum possible penalty of four years in prison. Oudsema's state sentencing guidelines called for a minimum term of between five and 23 months.

The victims -- Oudsema's daughter, Courtney Oudsema, and her cousin Serenity Meinders -- lived at the same house as Chillum Oudsema at 3214 MacArthur, where the drowning occurred Aug. 1. The girls were found in an unused pool in the back yard and may have been there for hours, authorities said. Muskegon Township police said there was more than 6 feet of murky water in the deep end.

Authorities said Oudsema -- a third-shift worker who normally sleeps in the daytime, although he had not worked the previous night -- had been in the basement, sleeping at times while in charge of watching the children. He is separated from Courtney's mother, Kristina Oudsema.

Police said the mother of Serenity Meinders, Laurie Stephens, left the home at 7:30 a.m. for work while the girls were sleeping in their room. Police said Serenity's 2-year-old sister, Kaden Meinders, was awake, and Stephens took the toddler down to Chillum Oudsema, who was in his basement bedroom.

The drowned children were discovered after Stephens returned home about 1:30 p.m. Authorities said it appeared the girls had been in the pool for a couple of hours before they were found. The other adult in the house when the girls died, the homeowner, was asleep on a living room couch.

In court today, Stephens said Chillum Oudsema should not be jailed. She has opposed the Muskegon County Prosecutor's Office decision to prosecute him.

"It was an accident," she said. "He told them not to go in the pool. I don't know why they did it, but we lost them." Stephens then dissolved into weeping and was led by a friend back to the spectator benches.

Immediately after, Kristina Oudsema asked the judge for the longest possible sentence. She said she knows her husband didn't mean any harm, "but the fact remains, he did neglect them girls, and they died because of it... I have to live the rest of my life without my daughter because he neglected her."

Senior Assistant Prosecutor Timothy Maat asked the judge to consider both points of view. "These girls were loved," Maat said. "These were two young girls who, like all children, deserved to be protected... They

are dead, and they shouldn't be. That it is why we are here."

Defense attorney Jeffrey P. West argued for leniency. "Chillum loved both of these girls very much ... and he feels the pain most today, because he feels partially responsible for their deaths." West said his client had warned the girls about the danger of the untended pool and noted that Oudsema -- who didn't own the home -- was not responsible for its maintenance and was not the only adult in the home at the time.

West also said lab tests showed Oudsema had no drugs or alcohol in his system. "He simply was sleeping when this happened," West said. "This was an unintended situation."

Graves said he had struggled with the sentencing decision and knew his "middle course" would satisfy neither side. "There's a world of hurt on both sides of this case," he said.

To Chillum Oudsema he said, "Your memories will punish you far more severely than any sentence this court can impose."

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Plea deal reworked

Wednesday, December 05, 2007

GRAND RAPIDS -- A reconstituted plea agreement resulted in a 5- to 15-year prison sentence for a Walker man accused of assaulting a 4-year-old at a day care center. In October, Matthew James Eggleston pleaded guilty to first-degree criminal sexual conduct in exchange for prosecutors dropping other charges and recommending a jail sentence of 5 to 15 years. But new legislation called for mandatory sentencing of more than five years. Eggleston ended up pleading to third-degree with the same prison time. Eggleston, 25, worked with 3- and 4-year-olds from September 2006 until April. He was working toward a teaching certificate.

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Article published Dec 5, 2007

Pratt denies assault

Trace Christenson

The Enquirer

Christopher Pratt told a Calhoun County jury Tuesday he did not and would not assault his former girlfriend.

"I have never loved anyone more in my whole life," Pratt said, "and I thought she loved me more than I loved her."

During 21/2 hours on the witness stand, Pratt testified that he did not assault Norreen Parker on June 24 at their rural Marshall home.

Pratt, 39, is facing up to 15 years in prison if he is convicted of domestic violence, felonious assault, interfering with a telephone communication and false imprisonment.

Pratt was the last witness in the trial, and jurors are expected to hear closing arguments this morning and receive instructions from Judge Stephen Miller before beginning their deliberations.

Parker, 35, testified last week that, during an argument, Pratt hit her with a chair, broke the telephone when she tried to call for help and then didn't allow her to leave.

She also said, during their 18-month relationship Pratt subjected her to mental and physical abuse, calling her names, not speaking to her for days and often physically assaulting her until that final day in June when she left the relationship.

Pratt denied it, telling the jury he never abused Parker.

During questioning by his attorney, J. Thomas Schaeffer, and later during cross-examination by Assistant Prosecutor Daniel Buscher, Pratt denied that he pushed, head-butted and routinely wrapped Parker in bear hugs.

And he said they never really argued until Parker began in late 2006 accusing him of seeing other women "every time I turned around."

On June 24, he said, the day started with Parker complaining he was having an affair, and later, when she returned from errands and found him on the phone, asked if he was talking to his girlfriend, saying, "You are cheating on me, you are cheating on me."

Pratt said Parker threw a phone and broke it when he insisted he was talking to a fishing buddy.

He told the jury he grabbed Parker to try and calm her down and pulled her onto his lap. It was then her legs struck a small table, not from when he threw a chair, as Parker told the jury.

Then, during the argument, he tipped over three chairs, pulled down a kitchen rack and knocked a microwave off the counter," he said.

"I am sick and tired of you saying I cheated," Pratt recalled telling Parker. "I never cheated on her, and I never would."

Rather than restraining her, Pratt said he told Parker to leave the house and threw her keys out the door. Moments later, he left when he realized her son had gone to call police.

Pratt told the jury the first day he met Parker he was wearing hunting clothes and had some blood on a sleeve of his shirt because he had been rabbit hunting and didn't have time to shower and change because he was preparing for her arrival for dinner.

"I had rushed around to clean the house to impress her," he said.

He agreed with her testimony that he urinated once in her yard and told her he was marking his territory.

"I am a hunter and I was goof-balling around," but insisted he did not do anything to belittle her or assault her.

"I planned to get married," he said, "more than you can imagine."

Pratt also denied ever physically assaulting his former wife, Susan Harrington, during their nine-year marriage.

She testified for the prosecutor that Pratt struck her several times and often verbally abused her.

He acknowledged the couple had a stormy marriage but blamed it on her and said the name-calling was mutual. He denied ever hitting her.

"There were some good times and some bad times — times I wouldn't trade for the world and times I would like to forget."

Trace Christenson can be reached at 966-0685 or tchrist@battlecr.gannett.com.



12/04/2007

Supporters of SafePlace participate in celebration of thanks

The Huron Daily Tribune

Officials and area residents gathered Friday at the Franklin Inn for a celebration of thanks to the community for supporting SafePlace for the past two years.

Anita Booms said there were about 60 people in attendance, including Rep. Terry Brown, D-Pigeon, who was the evening's guest speaker.

During the evening, Booms said she announced the hiring of Jill Collins Brown, the former domestic violence victims advocate for Huron County, as the new Shelter Operations Manager.

Booms said the shelter is in the process of expanding services, and more information will follow when everything is finalized.

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Clinic aims to help area's uninsured



Argus-Press Photo by Cheryll Warren LISA BURNELL, R.N., clinical services director for Health Delivery Inc., makes some last-minute preparations for Tuesday's mobile medical unit opening on North M-52 in Owosso. Health Delivery will provide family medical service for Medicaid patients and others in the area.

By CHERYLL WARREN Argus-Press Staff Writer
Tuesday, December 4, 2007 10:04 AM EST

OWOSSO - A mobile medical clinic opens today, aiming to serve Medicaid patients and others who qualify.

Medicaid patients can receive health care without a co-pay or deductibles at the clinic. Families and individuals who have no insurance, or who are underinsured, are also welcome.

Hours are Tuesdays from 10:30 a.m. until 7 p.m. and Fridays from 8:30 a.m. until 5 p.m.

The mobile clinic, operated by Saginaw-based Health Delivery Inc., is located at 1490 N. M-52, Suite 1. Patients will register at that site and be served in exam rooms located in the mobile medical unit.

Current services include family medical care and immunizations. Lab and X-ray services will be provided through Memorial Healthcare.

Charles Smallman, a physician assistant, will be the medical care provider at the clinic.

According to statistics provided by Memorial Healthcare, Shiawassee County has 11,340 people who are eligible for Medicaid, and is the fastest growing county in Michigan for its percentage of the Medicaid population. Shiawassee County also had more than 8,300 uninsured people through the age of 64.

"We have recognized this need for several years," said Cathy Stevenson, community resources liaison for Memorial Healthcare.

Stevenson said Dr. Barbara Munson served a large population of Medicaid pediatric patients, and said that many of them have been unable to find medical care since Munson's death.

"Dr. Munson's request was 'make sure my kids get taken care of,'" said Stevenson. "This was a project we were working on already, and we decided to move on the mobile medical unit more quickly."

Memorial Healthcare has cooperated with the Human Services Council to help make the mobile medical unit a possibility.

Health Delivery hopes to have a permanent site by some time next summer. Services at the future site are expected to expand to include dental care and mental health care, as well as access to low-cost prescriptions and transportation services.

For information, call 729-4848. The number will be answered 24 hours a day.

MIRS

November 30/December 1, 2007

Medicaid Recipients Struggle To Find Health Care

For a month, Robin **BARKER** lived in pain because of a tooth that needed to be pulled. As a Medicaid recipient, Barker had no other choice.

"I called and it took a month just to get in. If I wanted surgery it would have taken until Jan. 9," the 42-

year-old Ann Arbor woman said. "When you're in pain, you're in pain."

Two years ago, she had four root canals performed at the University of Michigan Dental School in an effort to save some teeth. Because Medicaid wouldn't cover the procedure, she's \$1,700 in debt and she

may lose those teeth anyway because she can't afford the crowns, something Medicaid also won't cover.

Now with another tooth that needs attention, Barker isn't sure what she's going to do, saying, "I don't know 'cause I can't afford it."

The number of people eligible for Medicaid is rising in Michigan, but low reimbursement rates are leading fewer and fewer physicians and dentists to accept them as patients.

"Doctors are having to spend money out of their own pockets. Not many are willing to do that," said

AppaRao **MUKKAMALA**, president of the Michigan State Medical Society (MSMS).

Physician participation in the Medicaid program has dropped from 88 percent in 1999 to 64 percent in 2005, according to the MSMS.

Mukkamala, a Flint radiologist, said Medicaid covers only about half of the cost of care.

"Being a radiologist, it costs me \$30 to take a chest X-ray and I'm only getting back \$15 to \$16. So every time I take a chest X-ray of a Medicaid patient, that money comes out of my pocket," he said.

With around 1.5 million beneficiaries and only two-thirds of physicians accepting them, Mukkamala estimates that one-third of eligible participants lack adequate access to health care.

That lack of access extends to dental care, as well, according to the Michigan League for Human Services (MLHS). The group said fewer than two-thirds of poor and low-income children in the state receive dental care, compared with 80 percent or more of children in families with higher incomes.

Amy **OLSON**, director of First Call for Help at the United Way of Midland County, said she knows of only one dental clinic in the county that accepts Medicaid patients.

"People have called here and said they've called 1-800-DENTIST and numbers in the phone book and have been unable to find anyone that accepts Medicaid," Olson said. With only one participating clinic, it's hard to get an appointment, she said. MLHS reported that reimbursement rates for 14 of the 15 procedures covered by Medicaid are less than 1 percent of dentists' claims.

MLHS Senior Policy Researcher Jan **HUDSON** said, "Medicaid doesn't pay fair rates."

The Legislature cut reimbursement rates in 2003, 2005 and 2006, she said. Because of the low rates, coverage is at a critical stage, especially in specialty fields, Hudson said.

"There are physicians unable to make referrals for some procedures. It really is a major problem in Michigan," she said.

Mukkamala agreed that access to specialists' care in such fields as neurosurgery, ophthalmology, dermatology and urology is a problem.

"Even those doctors that see Medicaid patients may limit the number they see per day," he said. "With

only a few slots open every day, some patients are getting delayed care, which makes their condition worse and more costly to treat. It's a slippery slope."

Adding to the access problem is a shortage of dentists in Michigan, a league report said.

In 2007, 60 out of 83 counties, mostly in the northern Lower Peninsula and the Upper Peninsula, were

designated full or partial "health professional shortage areas" for dental services.

The federal government has determined that those areas have insufficient dental care providers for the

entire county or for specific groups, such as low-income residents.

James **McCURTIS** Jr., spokesman for the Department of Community Health, said dental care access is

improving, thanks to the Healthy Kids Dental program started in 2000.

"Things are moving forward. Things are looking good," he said.

The program is a partnership between the state and Delta Dental, which increased its reimbursement

rates to match those of Delta's commercial plan rates.

Currently there are 59 counties covered by the program. Not covered are Grand Traverse, Wexford,

Mason, Osceola, Oceana, Muskegon, Newaygo, Mecosta, Montcalm,

Ottawa, Kent, Bay, Ingham,

Kalamazoo, Calhoun, Jackson, Washtenaw, Cass, Berrien, Wayne, Oakland and Macomb counties.

Expansion is planned into Saginaw and Genesee counties next year, bringing the program to urban areas

for the first time.

However, areas like Wayne, Oakland, Kalamazoo and Berrien counties, which have large concentrations

of poor children, according to MLHS, continue to lack coverage.

Tom **KOCHHEISER**, director of marketing for the Michigan Dental Association, said his group would like

to see the Healthy Kids Dental program expand into adult care.

"About 80 percent of dentists in the state participate in the program, so it's really a win-win," he said.

*(Contributed by Capital News Service Correspondent Jeff **RILEY** Jr.)*

Health care driving millions into debt, group says

December 4, 2007

By PATRICIA ANSTETT

FREE PRESS MEDICAL WRITER

More than 2.5 million Michiganders with health insurance spend far too much of their household income on health bills, forcing them to pick between medical needs and other essentials and driving many into debt, a national report released today says.

The report from Families USA, a Washington D.C., health research and advocacy organization, estimates that more than 2 million Michiganders will spend more than 10% of their income in 2008 on health care, and another 537,000 Michigan residents will spend 25% of their household income on doctor visits, prescription and generic drugs, co-pays and other expenses.

Advertisement

"Health care that people used to take for granted increasingly is becoming unaffordable," said Ron Pollack, executive director of Families USA.

As examples, the report cites how a family earning \$60,000 a year, spending at least 10% or \$6,000 on health needs, would only have \$2,990 for medical expenses, after paying taxes and other household expenses, the report said.

A family earning the same amount that spends 25% of its household budget on health care would pay \$15,000 in medical bills_\$12,000 more than it had in its budget for those expenses, the report said.

Jan Judson, senior planning and research associate for the Michigan League of Human Services, said her non-profit, Lansing-based organization is hearing more about families making painful choices between spending on health needs and other essentials, such as food and fuel, as companies drop health insurance. "This is truly a crisis for Michigan families trying to do the right thing."

U.S. Sen. Debbie Stabenow, D-MI, and Rep. Bart Stupak, D-MI, said the report shows the need to expand government insurance programs for low-income children. Some 118,500 children are in Michigan's program but another 80,000 would be covered until legislative proposals before Congress, which President Bush has threatened to veto.

The report, one of the first six state-specific analyses by the organization, hopes to build discussion about issues in the 2008 presidential election, Pollack said.

The report is at www.familiesusa.org.

Find this article at:

<http://www.freep.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20071204/FEATURES08/71204048/1008/NEWS06>

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Published December 5, 2007

Report: U.S. teen births rise for first time since 1991

Midday update

Associated Press

ATLANTA - The nation's teen birth rate has risen for the first time in 14 years, according to a new government report.

The birth rate had been dropping since 1991. The decline had slowed in recent years, but government statisticians said today it jumped 3 percent from 2005 to 2006.

"It took us by surprise," said Stephanie Ventura of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, a co-author of the report.

The birth data for 2006 also showed births to unmarried mothers hit a new record high, and the overall birth rate has climbed to its highest level since 1971.

The teen increase was based on the 15-19 age group, which accounted for about 99 percent of the more than 440,000 births to teens in 2006.

The rate rose to 41.9 live births per 1,000 females in that age group, up from 40.5 in 2005.

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[Back](#)

Article published Dec 5, 2007
Holidays hard on food banks
Low supplies, rising need create problem

By MOLLY MONTAG
Times Herald

Without assistance from the Blue Water Community Food Depot, Delores Keasling of Port Huron said she and many other people wouldn't know where their next meal is coming from.

"Being on a budget like I am, I would probably not have as much food in my home," she said. "(I would) wonder what I was going to be cooking at times."

Demand for food at the Port Huron food pantry is continuing to increase, part of a national trend when combined with a decline in donations of surplus farm commodities is putting agencies in a bind.

Officials at the Food Bank of Eastern Michigan in Flint, where the community food depot buys food at a discounted price, already are squeezed to meet the demands of the 22 food pantries it serves.

While food depot officials said they haven't felt the full effect of commodity cutbacks, some national officials said the impact could be on the horizon.

Given the situation, groups are doing everything they can to save money.

The food depot in Port Huron has been operated strictly by volunteers since November when former executive director Misty Barr left her post to take another job. Officials are in the process of deciding if they will fill the position with a paid employee or use volunteers.

At the same time, the pantry reduced the number of days it distributes food from five days a week to three. The pantry distributed food to 272 households in November - a 24% increase from the same time last year.

Food chain

The food shortage isn't restricted to Michigan.

In November, officials at America's Second Harvest in Chicago issued a plea for donations, estimating the agency would face a 15 million pound food shortage by the end of the year. The agency, which bills itself as "the nation's food bank network," cited unusually high demand for emergency food at food banks across the country.

Ross Fraser, spokesman for America's Second Harvest, said fewer government commodities, not corporate donations, is the root problem.

Donations from food-manufacturing companies remain steady and in some cases have increased at the national level, he said.

To support farmers, the federal government buys surplus food and donates it to food banks. Since the farming economy is strong right now, the government is buying less.

Fraser said the federal farm bill, passed by the House of Representatives but stalled in the Senate, would increase government purchases of surplus commodities for the nation's food banks.

Changes

Bill Heinen, president of the Society of St. Vincent DePaul which oversees the Port Huron food depot, said he hasn't noticed a shortage of food in the Flint pantry, but volunteers have noticed less variety.

They've had to supplement their purchases in Flint by buying food at local stores.

Jacque Lowe, 53, said the food he picked up Monday from the community food depot is important for him. There is little food in the Port Huron man's house because he recently moved, and his disability check didn't show up at his new address.

With Lowe's fixed income, there is little money to spare.

"This food can tide me over until I get my check," he said.

Kara Ross, vice president of the Food Bank of Eastern Michigan, said agency officials have to drive farther - recently as far as New Jersey - to find food for its 22 regional drop-off sites. The agency also is making twice as many runs to its sites this year because the demand for food has become so great.

The extra driving is costing more money in gas and vehicle repairs.

It is unclear what the Flint food bank will do if the situation continues. One thing is for sure: Ross isn't expecting a reprieve in the near future.

"It's good that we can be here to provide food to people," she said. "But we don't see the situation in Michigan getting better anytime soon."

Sunrise Mission's annual campaign under way



News Photo by John Bronz

From left to right, athletic trainer Brad Nash, Superintendent Brent Holcomb, Kaitlyn Tomaszewski, Trooper Mark Tamlyn and school nurse Cheryl Lemke were on hand as Tamlyn presented a defibrillator to Alpena High School. Tamlyn, of the Michigan State Police Cheboygan Post, presents schools — more than 20 so far — with the defibrillators through the Michigan State Police Troopers Assistance program. He was saved by a defibrillator when he suffered cardiac arrest in September 2002. The presentation was important to Tomaszewski, as her father died of a heart attack.

By PATTY RAMUS

For the past eight years the Sunrise Mission has relied on monetary donations from the community to provide Christmas dinner for those who have no where else to go.

This year is no different.

The mission recently sent out its annual Christmas dinner mailings to approximately 2,000 recipients. The mailer states people can provide a meal or other services to a hungry or homeless person for \$1.92 donation.

This year the mission is preparing to provide more than 1,400 meals during the winter. The mailings are the primary fund-raiser for the mission and the money is used to pay for meals, Christmas gifts, utilities and other services provided to people.

The mission spends an average of \$125 per week on food staples such as milk, eggs and bread, said Director John Ritter.

"We just lay the need out there and depend on the community's generosity for what is returned," he said. "It isn't just the Christmas meal, if there's extra money we use that to carry us through the year."

Food such as turkey or ham, stuffing, corn and pie will be among the menu items for the Christmas dinner and the mission begins serving around 1 p.m.

The mission has provided a haven in Alpena for people in need for the past 18 years. The 25-bed mission provides laundry facilities, kitchen, Dial-A-Ride passes, long distance phone calls and case management services to help individuals find a place to live. People can stay at the mission for up to 90 days.

"We're here every day, 365 days each year. It's always open," Ritter said.

Ritter said people who didn't receive the mailer and want to make a donation can stop by the mission at 622 W. Chisholm St. or send a check to P.O. Box 493, Alpena. The mission also

accepts food donations.

Patty Ramus can be reached via e-mail at **pramus@thealpenanews.com** or by phone at 358-5687.

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[Back](#)

Article published Nov 29, 2007

NHS students aim to 'fill shelves' this holiday season

By Jason Carmel Davis
STAFF WRITER

Up until a few weeks ago, most high school students might have wanted to spend their Sunday watching the Detroit Lions. They also might have wanted to check out college applications, or even do homework.

But a group of Northville High School students, specifically the members of the school's chapter of the National Honor Society, have taken on a project that will help a number of families this holiday season.

Northville High senior Jessica Horowitz has started a program, "Fill the Shelves, Feed the Hungry," designed to stock the shelves at Northville Civic Concern, 42951 Seven Mile Road, so Civic Concern patrons will have a wide selection of items to choose from this holiday season, Horowitz said.

On two Sundays a month, Northville High National Honor Society members hit three area subdivisions to collect food. Homeowners in those neighborhoods are made aware of the group's efforts through fliers, which have been donated to the cause by the Northville UPS Store, 143 Cadycentre. Families place the food on their doorsteps and students make rounds scooping up the parcels, Horowitz said.

"We've had some really good turnouts and people have been really generous," she said, adding about 15 students take part.

One problem students have had, Horowitz said, is outdated items.

Members of Civic Concern ask that donors always check the expiration date on the items they plan to give. On one occasion, Mustang NHS students collected 627 food items. About one-third of those had to be thrown out, Horowitz said. Since then, the number of outdated items has decreased to one-sixth, she said.

Marleen Kunz, chair of Northville Civic Concern, said the students are doing an admirable job assisting her group. She said the effort is important since, at times, the shelves at Civic Concern become bare due to the economy, outdated items and other factors.

"We're just trying to educate people and make it known that people in Northville need help sometimes, too," Horowitz said. "Above all, we're just trying to look out for people in the community."

Northville Record staff writer Jason Carmel Davis can be reached at (248) 349-1700, ext. 108, or jasondavis@gannett.com.

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[Back](#)

Article published Dec 5, 2007
Community must help United Way

Sanilac County group badly needs public's financial support

Michigan is struggling, and no community is exempt from the daunting economic crisis that grips the state.

In the face of these desperate times, Sanilac County is in special peril. The county's United Way, a community organization that provides funding to 23 local agencies, is in dire straits.

Contributions are down. The decline is significant enough that United Way leaders extended the deadline for its \$185,000 fund-raising campaign to the end of this month.

Financial support is so bad, in fact, that the United Way was forced to reduce its aid to the 23 organizations that depend on it for funding to serve the county. The money the United Way raises each year is distributed quarterly to its member agencies. This year, December's fourth-quarter payments will be cut in were cut in half.

The reason speaks to the difficult times Sanilac County faces. The United Way has lost money - thousands of dollars this year - to the worsening economy. Many county residents who pledged contributions in last year's campaign were unable to meet their commitments this year.

"Each month, the amount of money that comes in from businesses and so on is shrinking because people are losing their jobs," said Kent France, the United Way of Sanilac County's executive director.

And there lies the irony: As more jobs are lost, the need grows for the services of the United Way's member agencies.

Eva's Place, the county's only emergency shelter for victims of domestic violence, sexual assault and homelessness, depends on the United Way for a quarter of its budget, according to Sherri Lanctot, an executive board member of Eva's Place and the SAVE Council, an organization that works to prevent domestic abuse.

Some United Way member agencies provide legal assistance to county residents whose homes are at risk of foreclosure. Others offer health services assistance.

These and other programs are especially crucial when communities such as Sanilac County are coping with worsening economic conditions. That's why the county's United Way needs our help now more than ever.

The \$185,000 the organization hopes to raise by this month's end is modest. It's not a great sum to address the needs of Sanilac's 44,752 residents (2005 U.S. Census Bureau estimate).

That makes meeting the United Way's fund-raising goal all the more critical. There is little overhead. Kent France operates this organization from his home.

The United Way is doing all it can to help its member agencies serve county residents. It cannot meet its goal without the community's support.

The County Press

'We should help people less fortunate'

by Jeff Hoard
Staff Reporter

One local towing company has made sure Lapeer County kids in need have a merry Christmas.

Janice Royce, a co-owner for Don McKay Towing in Lapeer, was on hand Monday afternoon to help pack away 92 toys donated at the Lapeer Chamber of Commerce office — 70 of which came directly from the towing company.

"We like giving and doing this," Royce said. "It's very important. We should help people less fortunate."

The unwrapped items, which included board games, stuffed animals, and toy cars, will go toward Toys for Lapeer County Kids. The toys will be given to different organizations including Lapeer Area Citizens Against Domestic Assault, North Branch Aid Society, Holiday Depot, United Way, Lapeer County FIA, Salvation Army, and Hispanic Aid Society. The toys will then be distributed to needy children across the county.

Volunteer Mark Monson, who was collecting the items from various drop spots in the area, said Lapeer is a very generous community.

"The merchants are always generous," he said. "They think of people with open hearts. Not only Christmas, but year around."

The Holiday Elfin Magic Parade took place Saturday and volunteers received 22 unwrapped toys. For the past three years, Don McKay Towing pulled Santa's sleigh, and when they stopped in front of the Chamber office building after the parade with their bundle of toys, Executive Director Neda Payne couldn't believe her eyes.

"When she pulled up in the sleigh, I was like 'Wow,'" Payne said. "It was very exciting."

"I'm very grateful for what she did. It was a wonderful thing to do. It was very generous."

More toys will be sought after the Fourth Annual Gloria Wegrzyn Christmas for Lapeer County Kids auction and jamboree taking place at 12:30 p.m. Dec. 9 at the Hitch-n-Post lounge, located at 1636 Imlay City Road in Lapeer.

Bands include Saint Paulie Street, Whiskie Brothers, Later Than Dark, Furlong River, Missing Time, Tung Tyed, and karaoke with Greg. Money from auctioned items will go toward purchasing toys to distribute to the organizations.

For more information, contact Hitch-n-Post at (810) 664-9154 or Paul

Helping children in need

CADILLAC - For some foster care children, Christmas isn't always necessarily a time of joy. Not only are they away from their parents, but some don't expect to wake up to gifts under the tree.

Through a partnership between the American Legion Post No. 94 and Iron Wheels, these groups hope that will change. On Saturday, they will hold an auction with money to benefit Santa's Helping Hands.

The annual event, sponsored by a motorcycle group called Iron Wheels, provides gifts to children in need that are placed in foster care in the Wexford County area.

"It is something we did last year - we do the auction and they (Iron Wheels) put on the event," said Richie Harris, commander of the Sons of the American Legion. "It is an all-day event (at the American Legion) with a pool tournament, food buffet, 50/50 raffle and the auction.

Last year, the groups raised \$1,800. This year, they are hoping for a lot more. That should not be too hard, according to Harris, with all the items donated for the auction. There are gift certificates, homemade blankets and other crafts, a folding poker table and many other items. Harris said the auction's big ticket item is a Harley Davidson collectors sword.

"We have a lot of items, but we are hoping to get more from the community," said Pam Munson, wife of American Legion Post No. 94 Commander William Munson. "We are accepting items up until the day of the auction. We also have collection canisters available at the Legion and some downtown businesses for anyone who would like to make a cash donation.

There also is a bank account for the program at Forest Area Credit Union in Manton, where people can make contributions in care of Santa's Helping Hands.

Once the event is over, members of the Iron Wheels uses the money to go shopping and buy gifts for the children. The gifts are then wrapped and dropped off at the Wexford County Probate Court, where they are distributed to the children in greatest need.

"They (members of Iron Wheels) get so excited when they are shopping for the children - and they do a really good job picking out the right presents," Munson said. "Then they are dropped off at courts, so no one knows who gets a gift.

The Santa's Helping Hands fund-raiser begins at 2 p.m. Saturday at the American Legion located at 422 N. Mitchell St. in Cadillac. The public is urged to attend.

"Not only is the fund-raiser for a good cause, but it gives people the chance to see who we are and what we do," Munson said. "It is a friendly, relaxed atmosphere.

People can drop off cash donations or items for the raffle up until the day of the event. The " Legion is open 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. Monday through Saturday and noon until 8 p.m. on Sundays. For more information, people can call the American " Legion at 775-6500.

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Charities lack warm clothes for children

By **Lindsay VanHulle**

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TRAVERSE CITY -- Dawn Weston has looked, but it isn't easy to find winter clothing for her daughter, Lyndsie.

She is seeking assistance from a number of places and her daughter received several items after a local church adopted Weston's family for the holidays. But Lyndsie, 6, still doesn't have everything she needs.

"I work and my husband works, and the money's just not there," said Weston, of Interlochen. "A lot of people out there are facing it, just like I am."

Adding to the hardship is the fact that some local agencies face limited supplies of winter clothing, particularly for children.

The Women's Resource Center posted a sign at its thrift shop on U.S. 31 South in Traverse City that seeks donations of such items as coats, gloves, hats, boots and snow pants.

"The kids are coming in here in tennis shoes. Their hands were frozen," manager Carol Rose said. "We just don't have enough stuff."

An early December snowfall means more people need warm clothing now, Rose said, but demand far outpaces supply.

Employees have sifted through their own children's drawers, pulling out any winter clothes they don't need, she said.

The center stores items throughout the year as things trickle in, but the supply cycles between full and empty when winter starts.

A rack of children's coats stood nearly full on the sales floor Tuesday afternoon, but there only were a handful of snow pants. Hats and scarves hung from a rack on one side of the room. Only five pairs of gloves, one of them women's, were on it.

More than a dozen pairs of children's boots lined the floor, but Rose said there weren't nearly enough to fit all shoe sizes.

An 11-year-old boy came to the store Monday looking for gloves and was disheartened to learn there weren't any pairs in his size, Rose said, adding that he took a pair of women's leather gloves anyway because he needed something to warm his hands.

"That's all I can find him," Rose said. "He was embarrassed. That was when I had enough."

Staff members put coats out early this year in hopes of avoiding a swell of demand all at once, but Rose said it hasn't worked.

"The need is just huge," she said. "All I see is these kids standing here and I can't help them."

A similar drop in children's clothing donations happened at The Salvation Army thrift store on 11th Street in Traverse City.

The store has items available, but many of them are sized for adults, manager Dorothy Schaub said. Demand for children's clothing rose when winter weather arrived a few weeks ago.

"We're not completely out," Schaub said. "If they can find their size, they get it."

But Robert Randall, retail director at the Goodwill store on South Airport Road in Traverse City, said the weather contributed, at least in part, to a slight increase in winter clothing donations.

As the season wears on, however, that likely will start to decline.

"Generally, when folks experience a weather change, they start shopping for other items to replace the wardrobes," he said. "So far, we've been able to keep up with the demand. We're hopeful that trend continues."

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Photos



The Women-s Resource Center has been short of winter clothing items for children after the recent winter storm. Record-Eagle



Kim Craig, a volunteer at the Women-s Resource Center, stocks inventory Tuesday afternoon at the U.S. 31 thrift store in Traverse City. Record-Eagle



This is a printer friendly version of an article from **Lansing State Journal**. To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

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Highlights

- Coming to the new state police headquarters will be:
- 255 employees from the Harrison Road headquarters
 - 132 workers from the Collins Road facility who work in the Office of Highway Safety, the investigative unit and the Motor Vehicle Division
 - 132 people from the Criminal Justice Information Center now in the General Office Building at the State Secondary Complex
 - 43 people from the training academy and state police lab at the State Secondary Complex
- The Emergency Operations Center will probably move to the State Secondary Complex, as will the state police warehouse

State police building likely to go forward

Critics eye future legislation to stymie similar projects

Chris Andrews
Lansing State Journal

Michigan State Police Director Peter Munoz told lawmakers Tuesday that the state police will benefit from a new headquarters in downtown Lansing.

And while several retired state police officers and current lawmakers were critical, it appears more likely than ever that the project will go forward.

"This project is going forward as we speak. I don't deny that," said Sen. Cameron Brown, a Sturgis Republican who chaired the Senate committee hearing and is a leading critic of the project. "The outcome of this will be legislation that prevents us from being at this point in the future."

The state has a contract with developers Gary Granger and Joel Ferguson to build a \$39 million state police headquarters at the corner of Grand Avenue and Kalamazoo Street.

The deal was approved by the Legislature's Joint Capital Outlay Committee and the State Administrative Board, typically the last step in a contract.

But the deal has generated intense public criticism from those who argue that politically connected developers have won a no-bid project to construct a state police headquarters in a bad location at a cost the state can ill afford.

Munoz defended the project.

He said the current headquarters needs a new roof and major heating and plumbing upgrades.

The new center, he said, will consolidate some operations and enable the department to operate more efficiently.

"The Michigan State Police is moving forward, and I believe it's time for all of us to move forward," he said.

The Granholm administration says the project will generate construction jobs and give a boost to Lansing's economy, while enhancing the state police.

But there was plenty of criticism at Tuesday's hearing of the Senate Homeland Security and Emerging Technologies Committee.

Rep. Rick Jones, a Grand Ledge Republican and former Eaton County sheriff, said a state police headquarters should be in a safe compound, rather than in the center of a city.

Rep. Mike Nofs, R-Battle Creek and a former state police commander, said a headquarters should have a staging area to mobilize in response to emergencies.

And retired Detective Lt. Ray Battani said resources should be put into restoring troop levels, rather than constructing a new headquarters.

"The troopers all say the same thing. We don't need a new building, we need more partners," he said.

But Department of Management and Budget officials said state police do need better quarters.

The Harrison Road headquarters in East Lansing has mechanical, heating and plumbing that is 70 years old.

According to a state analysis, the new state police arrangement would cost about \$6 million more than the current one over an 11-year period.

But the 11-year analysis is questionable because it includes two years - this year and next - when there are no costs to the state for the new building because they don't have it yet.

Factor those out, and the cost gap grows to \$13.6 million.

Granger said the developers are working with the state police to ensure that the headquarters meets the department's needs.

He said reports that the building is in a floodplain are false. The parking lot is in a floodplain, but that's common in such areas, he said.

His attorney, Patrick Reid, said the state would incur major penalties if it backed out of the contract.

"We are at a point where we can't stop," Granger said.

"As far as we're concerned, we are under a contract that we have to perform and we have to do our duty."

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